



News from

# Congressman Ron Kind

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S THIRD  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1406 Longworth House Office Building • Washington, D.C. 20515 • (202) 225-5506

---

## Understanding the Medicare Discount Drug Cards

By Congressman Ron Kind

This spring, Medicare beneficiaries began receiving advertisements, mailings, and promotions for participation in the new Medicare-approved prescription drug discount card program. This transitional program will only be in effect from June 2004 through December 2005, after which the Medicare prescription drug benefit will begin. Many seniors have relayed to me their frustrations with sorting through the sea of drug card options, and I wanted to provide some information on the program and offer resources to help you in deciding which card, if any, is best for you.

Beginning in June, Medicare beneficiaries have been able to purchase a private Medicare-approved drug discount card (with a maximum annual fee of \$30). These cards are being promoted as offering significant price discounts on your prescription drugs. However, the law does not require any specific level of savings, and it is very uncertain how much financial help the cards will provide.

Under the new plan, you are limited to one Medicare-approved card and will only be allowed to sign up for one card a year, preventing savings through multiple cards and prohibiting you from changing cards during the year to follow the lowest prices for drugs.

Wisconsin's Seniorcare program is a shining example of the great work that can be done to aid our nation's seniors with their prescription drug costs when federal and state governments cooperate. SeniorCare provides prescription drug assistance to citizens 65 years or older, and the level of aid is based on annual income. Unfortunately, citizens will not be able to enroll in both the SeniorCare and Medicare drug discount program. 90,000 Wisconsin seniors currently benefit from this program, and the vast majority of you will be far better off remaining in SeniorCare than enrolling in the new Medicare discount drug program.

Navigating the maze of available cards will be difficult. Cards may offer good deals on some of your medications, but no value for others. The specific drugs that are discounted will vary among the cards and may vary within a specific card throughout the year. Not all pharmacies will participate with all cards either. Finding the card that is right for you will require some research, but there is no guarantee one is available that will meet your needs. The following resources are available to help you when deciding whether to enroll in the discount card program and to determine what cards is best for you:

- The State of Wisconsin Board on Aging and Long-Term Care can provide information on drug card options. The toll-free number is 1-800-242-1060.
- Beneficiaries can also get help by contacting the benefit specialist in your area. Your benefit specialist is \_\_\_\_\_ and can be reached at \_\_\_\_\_.
- The U.S. Government offers assistance at 1-800-MEDICARE or by accessing information at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).
- There is also a Medicare Rx Discount Card Q & A on my website at [www.house.gov/kind](http://www.house.gov/kind). As always feel free to contact my office in La Crosse at 1-888-442-8040 with questions or concerns.